

The OLD Man's CALENDAR.

A DISCOURSE

ON

JOSHUA XIV. 10.

Delivered in the first Parish of *Hingham*, on the
LORD'S-DAY, *August 26, 1781*, the BIRTH-DAY
of the Author,

EBENEZER GAY. *K*

*Thus saith the Lord of hosts, there shall yet old men
and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem: and
every man with his staff in his hand for very age.*

ZECHA. VIII. 4.

Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death.

GEN. XXVII. 2.

*I said, days should speak, and the multitude of years
teach wisdom.*

JOB XXXII. 7.

*Nihil turpius est quam grandis natu Senex, qui nul-
lum habet argumentum, quo se probet diu vix-
isse, præter Ætatem.*

SENECA.

59 B O S T O N :

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MDCCLXXXI.



JOSHUA XIV. 10.

(The latter part of the verse.)

—*And now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old.*

THE numbering our days, so as to apply our hearts unto wisdom, is not computing the definite sum total of them to know how many they shall be; but the just reckoning them to be few and uncertain, and in consideration thereof, to live them religiously. Yet, to keep an account of those which are past, may be a help to the better improvement of those which may be to come, especially in our old age, when the latter must appear very few indeed compared with the former, and of the last importance to be spent well and wisely by us. The observation of our birth-day is to little good purpose, if we do not then with religious seriousness consider, how many years old we are. There is not in this assembly more than one person who can adopt the words of the text, and say, *I am this day fourscore and five years old.* Yet, all the aged here may, with him, receive instruction therefrom, to remember, as it becometh and concerneth us, how old we are. Forgetfulness is a common infirmity of old age. The decay of memory is the first of their mental faculties which men feel, and are willing to own, and do complain of. In some it is to that degree, that they are not able to tell how old they are. But all that can count the number of the past years of their lives, do not apply this knowledge to the good uses it might serve them. That

such of us who are old may so remember this, as that our minds may be deeply impressed, our affections and actions duly influenced by the consideration thereof, is the design of the present discourse.

I. REMEMBERING how old we are, the goodness of God in prolonging our days, should be greatly admired and thankfully acknowledged by us. The boundaries of human life have been different in the several ages of the world. There have been gradual abbreviations of it from the first man, Adam, who lived nine hundred and thirty years, to Moses, who lived an hundred and twenty. But then, the term fixed by God was threescore years and ten. This hath ever since been the goal that stints our race. Some run beyond it, but the most do not reach it. Of David, who lived just seventy years, it is said, that he died in a good old age, and full of days—being as many as those of a long life, in the scripture-account, and of which there was a promise. The addition of ten or fifteen years, was then, and is now, rare, and vouchsafed to very few individuals of mankind. These are distinguished from the most of their fellow-mortals in the length of their days, and are remarkable instances of longevity; and should take special notice of it themselves, as doth the pious Israelite in the text, *Caleb*, the son of Jephunneh the Kenzite. He was one of the twelve princes, heads of the tribes, whom Moses, when he came to the borders of Canaan, sent to search the land: and the only man, beside Joshua, the son of Nun, that animated the faint-hearted people to go in, and take possession of it. Which he could do with greater assurance of success in the attempt, because God had promised to give him *Hebron*, a city of the most gigantic men, and impregnable walls, together with the adjacent country, for his inheritance. To which he put in his claim unto Joshua, the captain of the Lord's people, seven years after he had them into Canaan, and among the several tribes.

Caleb was probably the oldest man of the whole congregation that entered into Canaan—all his cotemporaries dying in the wilderness. And with admiration and gratitude he reflected on the goodness of God, in the preservation of his life to that time. *Now behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years since the Lord spake these words unto Moses, even since the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old.*

AN instructive example, my aged brethren, is this unto us, to consider how long God hath kept us alive, and affect our hearts with an admiring and thankful sense of the goodness of God therein toward us. The Author is the Preserver of our lives, who hath given us all things necessary to our sustenance, convenient for our use, and pleasant for our enjoyment—all *those things by which men live*. He took us out of the womb, and did make us to hope when we hung on our mothers breasts. He nursed our tender infancy, and guarded our heedless youth: and having obtained help and mercy of him, we continue unto old age. This should be marvellous in our eyes, while we see so many dying around us ere they arrive at it. To God our escapes from death belong, and should be thankfully ascribed, when the arrows of it are constantly flying so thick about us. We have been a-like subject as others to mortal diseases and fatal accidents, from which we have been preserved to this day. Our travel, as Caleb's, hath been through a wilderness, in which the carcasses of the most of that generation which set out with us are fallen. But God hath kept us alive amidst innumerable dangers that have surrounded us. On which if we look back, our souls must be filled with wonder, and our mouths *with praise*, that we are not destroyed from off the earth. Our frail bodies in which we dwell, are houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust: can we but marvel that in so many years they are not mouldered down; or that they fell not long ago, when the rain of

affliction descended, the floods of sorrow came, and tempests of adversity beat upon them. How often hath God healed our diseases, and brought us back from the gates of death, that we might praise him in the land of the living? David in his old age reflecting how marvellously he had been holden up from the womb to that time, said, "I am as a wonder unto many." Psalm 71. He was most so to himself, that he was yet alive, when he thought of the troubles, fatigues, and dangers he had been carried through. How melting the consideration, that the long-suffering God hath spared us, while we by our sins have been continually provoking him to cut off the number of our months in the midst! He hath prolonged our days, which the indiscretions and extravagances of our youth; the excesses of our appetites and passions would else have shortned. We should remember all the way which the Lord hath led us these so many years, and thank him for the conduct of his kind providence in bringing us to a great old age. O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard; who holdeth our souls in life. Bless the Lord, O my soul, who redeemeth thy life from destruction.

BUT, is it such a favour to live to old age, the days of which are evil, and the years such as we are apt to say, we have no pleasure in them? I answer, that life is the principal good, the foundation and capacity of our enjoying any: and the lengthening it to old age is an instance and display of the goodness of a faithful Creator, who hath promised it them that follow him in the way of his commandments; as also, that goodness and mercy shall follow them to the end of their days. Isaiah 46. 3. 4. Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, saith God, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are born by me from the belly, and carried from the womb, and even to your old age I am he, and unto hoar hairs I will carry you, I have made, and I will bear, even I will carry, and will deliver you. Such ten-

der care of divine providence from the beginning to the end of long life, as these words express, certainly demands the thankful acknowledgments of the aged. Were we indeed to live only in this world, so full of troubles we meet with in it from wailing infancy to querulous decrepitness, it might not be thought so great a favour to live unto old age, which is attended with peculiar inconveniences. The evil of these days, added to that of the former of our lives, might seem more than a balance for the good enjoyed in them all. In the judgment of wise Solomon, concerning a man whose happiness is limited to this world, Ecclesi. 6. Though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good—none that makes him happier upon the whole, than if he lived not at all:—hath seen no more good than if he never had been born. The vanity and vexation of spirit in a life more than twice as long as *Methuselah's*, would eat out the heart of all the good in its sorrows multiplying with the years of it, would render life an insupportable burthen. “For my part, saith Mr. How, upon the strictest enquiry, I see nothing in the life of man upon earth, that should render it for itself, more the matter of a rational election (supposing the free option given him the first moment of his being) than presently again to cease to be the next moment.” If we can see more good in the present life, on the supposition there is none to follow it, than that heavenly man did, yet we must be sensible that our best days, as to worldly enjoyment, are first passed, and if with them an end had been put to our existence, we should have been so far happy as not to have seen the evil of these days of old age; and we may have cause to think it had been well for us not to have lived to them. But, since this life is in order to another, and we are here in a state of probation and preparation for an everlasting life of perfect felicity; and the good and evil received at the hand of the Lord are improvable to our obtaining it, the prolongation of our days

on earth is, on this account, an advantage infinitely exceeding all the disadvantage thereof. The just value of the present life is to be estimated by it's relation to a future—the dependance which our eternal well-being hath upon it. It is the precious season of working out our salvation, and making our calling and election sure: the which requireth, as diligent care and labour, so likewise competent time. No part of it which is allotted to us for that purpose, should we think to be redundant, but fear rather the whole will scarce be sufficient: especially, when we consider how much of that which is past we have lost in sloth and idleness. Did we set out early to follow God in a religious course of life, and make as steady and speedy progress to the end, as human frailty ordinarily admits, we may find the longest day of life short enough to perform our journey to heaven. Length of days is a real advantage to our improving in virtue, perfecting of holiness, and attaining to high degrees of glory at last. They therefore to whom it is granted, may have great cause to thank God therefor, whatever inconveniences attend their old age. And yet, it might be in favour to others, that they died before the evil came; having lived long enough to answer life's great end, and be ripe for heaven.——

Do any of us continue wicked, that are waxed old? let not the riches of God's goodness, forbearance and long-suffering, be despised, but adored by us. Is it less wonderful mercy in him, that hath kept us so long alive in our rebellion against him, than if we had faithfully served him? How admirable is his patience that hath born with us to this day in our sins—that he hath spared us, when multitudes of our coevals (not greater sinners than we) have been cut off in the midst of their days? Is it no favor to be so long reprieved from death and hell, and to have still opportunity to seek for pardon with the least hope of obtaining it, which the damned have not? God is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that we should come

to repentance ; for which the evil days of old age may be a space given us, though not so convenient a season as we have let slip, and irrecoverably lost. So that whatever our character be, we should admire, and thankfully acknowledge the goodness of God in keeping us alive.

2. To remember, as we ought, how old we are, bringeth death, and it's awful consequence, in a near and affecting view to us. It conduceth to make us know our end, that it is *near*, it is *near*, and hasteth greatly. This is a point of wisdom, to which we should apply our hearts, to know practically, or with serious regard to consider our latter end, that we shortly must die out of this world, and enter on eternity. Of this we must needs be sensible, when we that are old recollect how many years we have already lived—many times more than we can expect still to live. We have not the skill of numbering our days, if we reckon not those to come very few indeed compared with those that are past. Men judge better of the shortness of time when it is past, than when it is passing ; and by setting a lesser portion of it against a larger. “ Few, said Jacob to Pharaoh, when he was an hundred and thirty years old, have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers.” Gen. 47. 7. Do the days of the years we have lived seem few ? how much fewer, in a comparative view of them, must those we may have to live seem to us ? a day or a year to come, is not longer than one that is past. If it appear so to us, we measure time falsely, and our mistake, by the least consideration might be corrected. How long have I to live ? said Barzillai to the King—I am this day fourscore years old. Every man that is so old or older, should be as deeply sensible, that he hath not long to live. It is vain presumption in the young, but most unreasonable and absurd in the aged,

to put far away the evil day of death. Such is the common dotage on life, as to occasion the remark, that there is no man so old but thinks he may live a year longer. Were any of us sure that we should ; is death at no greater distance to be unregarded and unprepared for by us ? The living know that they shall die. From our age and the circumstances of it, we may with as much certainty conclude that the time of our departure is at hand. The bodily frame is so weakened, and such irreparable breaches are made in it, that it's dissolution is daily to be expected. We may say as Job, Our breath is corrupt, our vital spirits are wasted, our days are extinct, the graves are ready for us. We are tottering over them, and shall soon tumble into them. This consideration of the near approach of death, (which is included in the serious remembrance of our great age) would be available, in way of rational influence, to bring our hearts unto wisdom, and engage us to a good improvement of the few uncertain days which may be added to our so many past years, and so to live every day as if it were our last. Considering ourselves so near the eternal world, our great concern would be to get prepared for a speedy removal by death into it, and to appear at that awful bar, before which nature in a very little time will let us. " As a ship which hath been long at sea toils'd and weather-beaten, which is shattered in it's timber, and hath lost much of it's rigging, should do nothing in that case but work toward the port, there to find it's safety and ease ; so should a man, who having past many storms and agitations of this world, is grievously battered and torn with age, strive only to die well, and get safe into the harbour of eternal rest."

3. REMEMBERING how old we are, and therefore have not long to live, we should review our actions, and repent of our sins. Happy are those aged servants of God who, reflecting on their past behaviour in life,

can say with him in the text, we have *fully followed the Lord*. But they cannot pretend they have done so without many straying steps. Their rejoicing is this, the testimony of their conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have their conversation in the world. They still look back with sorrow and shame on the sins of their youth, and renew their repentance of all they committed before and since their conversion; and do not think themselves so righteous in the sight of God, by imputation, or sanctification, as not to need continue their repentance in old age, and to the end of their days. Good men die repenting. A repentance unto life is better compleated, than begun, on a death-bed.—If any of us have lived impenitent to old age, and are now to begin the difficult work, for which we have so little uncertain time; let us not delay a moment longer to turn from our evil ways unto the Lord, and follow hard after him. With what confusion must it cover us, to recount the many years we have spent in sin, following worldly lusts and vanities, and have irrecoverably lost the most and best of our time and strength given us for the service of God, and the work of our salvation. Shall we rob God, and defraud our own souls of the small remainder? It was good advice of a Jewish Rabbi, Be sure to repent one day before thy death. If we that are very old mean to do so, we must repent to-day; for we have least reason to boast of to-morrow.—But, *can a man be born again, when he is old?* Can he be converted, and become a regenerate child of God, when he is grown old in sin? It seemeth a miracle of grace that he should be so; but it is not to be dispaired of as impossible—nothing is so with God. To a repentance which is unto salvation, the succour of divine grace is necessary; and we do not know it is too late for us to seek it: soon will it be so, if we still neglect or refuse it. To-day, after so long a time of diso-

bedience to the gospel, are we called upon, not to harden our hearts. The goodness of God in keeping us alive to this day, leadeth us to repentance, and encourageth us to hope for pardon and acceptance with God, through Jesus Christ, upon it. Wherefore hath the Lord waited, but that he might be gracious; and been so long-suffering toward us, but that we might have this late opportunity of turning unto him? It is at our infinite peril that we defer a day longer. "Wherefore is our day of trial extended beyond the common term? Is it not indulged to the great need our past conduct hath of it? And shall our folly reverse the kind intention of that indulgence?" So the blessing of long life which God hath given us, will be turned into a curse, as it is written, Isa. 65. 20, The sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed—the more accursed for dying so old an impenitent.

4. REMEMBERING how old we are, our hearts should be loosened from this world. Our affections to, our cares about, and pursuits after, the things of it be moderated. The consideration of our having lived so many years in it, and must therefore soon leave it, is proper and useful to wean our hearts from it's most desirable enjoyments. Barzillai found it so, when David invited him to go and spend the rest of his days in a palace. "The king said unto Barzillai, come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old: and can thy servant discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men, and singing women? Wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burthen unto my Lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompence

it me with such a reward ? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father, and of my mother." The consideration of his great age prevailed against the love of the world, which is deeply rooted in the hearts of men, and is wont, to continue and increase until death. All it's alluring baits could not draw him from his home to Jerusalem, where he might have lived in greater splendor, wealth and delicacy. All that is tempting in this world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, came a-breast and assaulted him at once ; but he withstood them, by calling to mind how old he was. The grandeur and opulence of a court-life, the dainties of a royal table, and charms of musick, had no force on him to embrace the king's grateful and generous offer. It much better became him, he justly thought, who was so old, and he much rather chose to retire to his private house, where he might pass his last days more free from the dangerous temptations of an insnaring world, and better prepare for death and the grave, to which he was so near. O that we who are old might learn by this noble example, to get our hearts weaned from the world before we are removed, as very soon we must be, out of it. Surely we forget how old we are, while we mind earthly things, having all our thoughts and cares employ'd about them. If this was our way in youth, and middle-age, it was then our folly : much more inexcusable is it now in our old age. What is more absurd and shocking than to see men who are just going out of the world, loving it as fondly, and scraping for it as eagerly, as if they were never to leave it ? What are all the honors, and riches, and pleasures of it to us, who can so little time enjoy them ? Did we retain a natural relish of them as quick and strong as in youth, this thought might be enough to cool our thirst, and slacken our endeavours after them, and abate our complacence in them. It is our

shame and misery, if our long experience hath not taught us the vanity of this world. What did we ever get by following it hitherto? Not any thing which satisfieth us: nor shall we, if we follow it to the end of our days. Vain will all our expectations from this world be found. Is it not in a manner dead to us? And shall not we in affection be dead to it?—The aged servant of the Lord, who said, *I am this day fourscore and five years old*, did indeed take a prudent thought and care to secure for himself and posterity that part of Canaan which was allotted to him by God, and confirmed with an oath by Moses.—It is the inordinate love of the world, such as excludeth the love of the Father, and obstructeth our following the Lord, which we are to take heed and beware of, as most ill-becoming our age, who can need, or use the things of it but a little while. And as to our children, which may live in this world after us, we should warn them of the evil of covetousness, and not by our anxiety in providing for them leave them an example of it. Can we not, in the faith of the dying Patriarch, trust them to the care of a good God which hath fed us all our life long unto this day? Gen. 48. 15.

3. REMEMBERING how old we are, let patience under the infirmities and afflictions of these our evil days have it's perfect work in us. Few that are much younger than Caleb, when he was fourscore and five years old, can say as he did, "as yet I am as strong as I was at forty"—the time when men are in their full strength. If by reason of a more than ordinary firm constitution, any live to be fourscore, yet commonly is their strength then *labour and sorrow*. So decayed are they in body and mind, that they cannot do the business nor enjoy the comforts of life; which is sometimes, tho' rarely, extended farther. But the evil days usually come much sooner, the years in which men say, they have no pleasure in them. And they are usually attended with

such weaknesſes, pains, diſeaſes, diſquiets, miſeries of various kinds, as make folk (ſaith the Roman orator) complain of a load lying upon them heavier than mount *Ætna*. But the conſideration of our great age, may help us to bear the afflictions of it patiently, as knowing it is not long we have to bear them. How full ſoever our evil days are of troubles, they are few, and will ſoon be finiſhed. They are few compared with our good days of youth, and health, and ſtrength, and rejoicing. Have we not many more years of mercy to remember and thank God for, than we now have of affliction to paſs through in this world? Had we not enjoyed the good of the former, we had not ſuffered the evil of the preſent. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and ſhall we not receive evil? If we would not have lived to old age, why were we unwilling to die before? If we would, why ſhould we repine at the decays of a frail nature, and be diſſatisfied that we were made men? There is no temptation or trouble that befalleth us, but what is common to man. It is the condition of humanity to be liable to ſuch infirmities and inconveniences. We ſuffer them by a natural unavoidable neceſſity. “Theſe things in a long life, are like duſt, and dirt, and rain in a long journey.” A few weary ſteps more will bring us to the end of our’s.—In reſpect of the public ſtate of things the days are evil, which make theſe of old age the more ſo unto us. If it be not for want of enquiring wiſely concerning this, that we ſay the former days were better than theſe, and we had more pleaſure in them, yet, remembering how old we are, let us in our patience poſſeſs our ſouls, ſubmitting to the providence of God, and believing that he hath wiſe and good reaſon for ſuffering the times to be as they are. Soon will there be an end, if not of theſe troubles, yet of our days, and we ſhall ſee no more the evil work that is done under the ſun.—Should we have

the trial of out-living our serviceableness in the world, and be laid by as vessels of no more use, the consideration of our being wasted and worn out with age, should make us contented, and others also, to whom we may seem burthen some ; but shall not long be so. Passive obedience is that which God calleth us to in our age and weakness, and in which we must serve and honour him in the conclusion of our labour.

It is one, and not the least, of the melancholy circumstances of old age, to have buried the most, or all, of our coeval friends, early acquaintance, and dear companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, and be deprived of the benefit and comfort of their society. For, whatever be the reason, though we taste the wine of new friendship we have contracted, and it make our hearts glad, yet we are apt to think the old was better. The hope of going ere long to the spirits of just men made perfect, solaceth the minds of aged christians, when they sit alone, and feel their want of the company of pious departed friends, with whom they used to take sweet counsel. Having set down the names of many who were gone before him into the world of spirits, Mr. Baxter writes thus : "*I name these for my own delight and comfort ; it being pleasant to me to remember what companions I shall have in the heavenly joys, and praises of my Lord.*" Death dissolves not the union of souls knit to one another in holy love. There is but a short absence, and they shall meet and congratulate in a better world, where the communion of saints is perfected.—While in this tabernacle aged christians do groan, being burthened with many afflictions ; but should wait patiently for deliverance therefrom : which, though they have greater reason, may be more difficult for them to do, because of the good hope and earnest desire in them of passing through death to a state of rest and happi-

ness in heaven. This trial is peculiar to assured christians, who have the most lively views and expectations of being with the Lord, when they shall be absent from the body. The height of their piety encreaseth the trial of their patience in waiting for God's salvation. The delay of their hopes and desires, is a singular exercise of their patience under the afflictions of this life : especially, when they have many times thought themselves passed the storms and agitations of this world, just at harbour, and have been put back again to sea. The ship, however, is still under sail, and they are constantly making nearer approaches to, and shall shortly reach their desired haven. Ye have need of patience, saith the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise : for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

6. REMEMBERING how old we are, let us wholly, and more closely follow the Lord to the end of our lives—hold on our way of faithful obedience, and not be tired by the length of it, and be weary of well doing. We should take heed that we suffer not decays of grace with those of nature ; but while our outward man is perishing, our inward man be renewed day by day. Our diligence should be quickned, our zeal promoted amidst, and even by our bodily weaknesses, as they intimate the time of working out our salvation is short. We do not, as Caleb did, retain our natural vigour to be employed in the service of God, nor can we expect our youth will be renewed in old age, as sometimes it hath been after sickness ; yet waiting upon the Lord, we may (according to his promise) *renew our spiritual strength, and mount up with wings, like eagles* (when they have renewed their plumes, and fly toward heaven, in earnest desires and endeavours after higher degrees of grace and holiness. Are we

not too apt to grow remiss in the business of religion, dull and sluggish in the performance of the duties of it; and to think our age will excuse this in us?—whereas this consideration should urge us to greater diligence in the important work, for the accomplishment of which we have so little time remaining. Have we not still much to do, that we may be prepared as we wish to be for death and eternity? and O how short a time to do it in? we that are so near the grave, where there is no work, should do with all our might that which we are infinitely concerned to finish well. Old age hath some peculiar advantages for the business of religion, which we should embrace. It disableth us from following the world in eager and incessantly laborious pursuits; and so we may the more fully follow the Lord in the easier ways of godliness, and mind the one *thing needful*. It abateth the violence of sensual inclinations; and it exempteth from many temptations to sin, into which youth betrayeth men. It alloweth us not to run with the profane and dissolute to the excess of riot—excuseth us from conformity to the world in its vain fashions, and shutteth us out of much idle time—wasting company, that we might converse with God in secret, by reading, meditation, and prayer. And we should not deprive ourselves of the benefit of public ordinances of worship, so long as we are any ways capable of giving our profitable attendance. Psal. 92. 13. 14. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age: they shall be fat and flourishing. We should diligently improve all means and advantages to our thriving in grace, and abounding in the fruits of righteousness, even in old age. The prophet saith of the millennial state, Isa. 65. 20. *There shall be no more an old man that hath not filled up his days.* Our last will be empty days, if they be passed in the slothful

neglect of our duty. Let none such be put into the *Calendar*—be joined to the days of our years, or come into the number of the months. Let our days to the very last of them be filled up with religious virtue, and a long life compleated in us—So will our old be truly “honourable age:” Whereas, nothing is more shameful, than to have no other proof of our living long, than that we have been threescore and ten, or fourscore years and more, in the world.

7. REMEMBERING how old we are, we should be willing, when our time cometh, to die. If the consideration of our great age hath the forementioned effects upon us, it may be of this comfortable use to us at the close of our days. It is a common saying, the young may, the old must, die. These die in course, and by necessity of nature. Of which necessity we should make a virtue, in being truly willing, at the call of God and nature, to leave this world, in which we have had so large a share of life. To die willingly, and go away rejoicing in hope of eternal life, is the crowning virtue of a good life. It doth honour to religion, and might convince the infidel and ungodly part of mankind of its reality and excellence; and that a holy life is indeed the best, which hath so peaceful and happy an end. And surely, they that have followed the Lord to a good old age, should be willing and glad, and only wait for leave, to go to him; although the passage be through the valley of the shadow of death. It becometh such to be satisfied with long life. And if at the end of it, they feel any reluctance to a departure hence, to say unto the lingering spirit, as good old Hilarion did, “Go forth, O my soul, why dost thou pause and stop? hast thou served God these threescore and ten years, and art thou afraid to die?” The very learned and pious *Matthew*

Mead, when he was dying, said, " I am going home; as every honest man should, when his work is done ; and I bless God I have so good a home to go to." O how welcome is the day of such a man's death, and more to be rejoiced in by him, than the day of his birth — To our so great advantage in life, and comfort at death, might it be for us, my aged friends, to remember how old we are.

HAD I room therefor in this Discourse, calculated more especially for the use of the aged of this flock of the Lord's people, I would address my young hearers, and exhort them betimes to learn the holy art of numbering their days, so as to apply their hearts unto wisdom : and recommend to their imitation also the example of faithful Caleb, who followed the Lord from his youth ; as his own conscience testifieth when he was so old, as he telleth us in the text, and God also bare him witness. Forty years old (at which age men are reckoned young) was I, saith he in the context, when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea, to spy out the land—and I *wholly followed the Lord*. The same testimony God himself gave of him. Commending the obedient spirit which then was in him, saith, Numb. 14. 24. *My servant Caleb followed me fully*. In the Book of Ecclesiastus, chap. 46, verse 10, it is to his honour recorded, " The Lord gave strength unto Caleb, which remained with him to his old age, so that he entered the high places of the land, and his seed obtained it for an inheritance, that the children of Israel might see, that it is good to follow the Lord." See here, my young people, an encouraging example for you to do so. As you desire life and love many days, that you may see good, walk not in the way of your hearts, but turn your feet now unto God's testimonies, and wholly follow the

Lord your God—so you may arrive to a good old age : or, if you die before, shall obtain an inheritance in the better country, that is, the heavenly Canaan.—O ye beloved children, my mouth is opened, my heart is enlarged, to speak much unto you, and warn you to flee youthful lusts : but to follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, every christian virtue, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart : that the friend of your souls may have the joy to see you walk in the truth, following the Lord as dear obedient children.

BUT it is time for me to put an end to this discourse.

I ASK of my hearers, young and old, a few minutes attention to the conduct of divine Providence toward their aged Minister, in the prolongation of his life.

LO NOW, my brethren, I am this day fourscore and five years old—A wonder of God's sparing mercy ! Sixty-three of these years have I spent in the work of the ministry among you. One hundred and forty-six years ago, your forefathers came with their pastor, and settled in this place. I am the third in the pastorate of this church, which hath not been two years vacant. Scarce any parish but hath had more in that office in so long a space of time. The people of this have been steady to their own ministers, living to old age ; have not been given to change, nor with itching ears have heaped to themselves teachers. I bless God, who disposed my lot among a people, with whom I have lived here in great peace, eleven years longer than either of my worthy predecessors. † I have only to wish

† The Rev. *Peter Hobart*, and,
The Rev. *John Norton*.

that my labours had been as profitable, as they have been acceptable to them. I retain a grateful sense of the kindnesses (injuries I remember none) which I have received from them. While I have reaped of their carnal things to my comfortable subsistence, it hath been my great concern and pleasure to sow unto them spiritual things, which might spring up in a harvest of eternal blessings. That their affections to me, as their pastor, have continued from fathers to children, and children's children, hath been thankfully observed by me; and should have been improved as an advantage and incentive to do them (in returns of love for love) all possible good. It is but little I can now do in the work to which I am kept up so late in the evening of my days, and my people may feel their great need of one more able in body and mind to serve them in the gospel-ministry. In this case, by brethren, I hope that no partial regard to me, or parsimonious view to your worldly interest, will hinder your timely providing yourselves with such an one. As much as I dread and deprecate the being cut down as a cumberer of the ground in this part of the Lord's vineyard; I would not with my useless old age fill up the place, and deprive you of the help, of a profitable labourer in it. I submit to the wisdom and will of God my own desire to finish my course of life, and the ministry I have received of him together; while I make the humble acknowledgment and prayer to him in Psalm 71. "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto I have declared thy wonderful works: Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not, until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation." Caleb, when he was as old as I am, could say, As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me; that is, when he was forty years old. As my strength was then, even so my strength is now, for war, both to go out, and to

come in.—It is far otherwise with me : yet, what remaineth of the little strength I ever had for the ministerial warfare, I would as gladly spend in the service of your souls, and assist you all I can in your christian combat against the enemies which oppose your salvation. This would I do, God enabling me, as long as I am in this tabernacle of frail flesh, knowing that I must shortly put it off ; and exchange the *Sacred Desk* for the *Silent Grave* !—But, O my soul, how awful the long—the very long and strict account to be given to God of thyself, and of thousands more committed to thy charge, to watch also for their safety and everlasting happiness ! Brethren, pray for me, that I may find mercy of the Lord in that day : which if I should fail of, it had been good for me, and perhaps for you also, perishing by my neglect, that I had never been born. The consideration of which should excite my utmost care and diligence to make full proof of my ministry, and engage your attendance upon it in such a manner as will shew you are not grown into a weariness of it, which would render it unprofitable to you. I have been young, and now am old. Your fathers despised not my youth for its weakness ; nor have you my old age for the infirmities that attend it : Which giveth some encouragement to hope that my long continuance with you is not so much to the hinderance of the gospel of Christ, and detriment of your spiritual interests, as I am often ready to fear. After some decay or interruption of the Philippians' liberality to Paul, he thus writeth unto them, Phil. 4. 10. *I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again.* So hath yours of me. may add, as he doth, *not that I speak in respect of want,* which you have let me suffer in these difficult times. You lay fresh engagements upon me to exert myself in the service of your souls ; and if the God of my life and health prolong the same any farther, I

would go on in the strength of the Lord God, to labour for your salvation, ardently aiming at the gracious commendation which the minister of the church in Thyatira received from Christ, Rev 2. 19. I know thy works; and the last to be more than the first. That mine may be more faithful, and more successful, God of his mercy to me and you grant for Christ's sake.

AND now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.

